

# KPS CONSULTING

“Building an Access Bridge in Technology and Telecommunications”

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April 14, 2004

By electronic filing:

Marlene Dortch

Secretary

Federal Communications Commission

445 12<sup>th</sup> Street, SW

Washington, DC 20554

Re: **Ex Parte Presentation**

CG Docket No. 03-123, CC Docket No. 98-67

Dear Ms. Dortch:

On April 13, 2004, the undersigned, on behalf of Communication Service for the Deaf, Inc. (CSD), had a telephone conversation with Dane Snowden, Chief of the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau, to discuss the provision of video relay services (VRS). During the conversation, the undersigned raised the following points:

VRS is the only telephone service that is functionally equivalent to voice telephone service for various segments of the deaf population, including individuals whose first language is American Sign Language (ASL) and individuals who are unable to type because they are senior citizens or children.

VRS is the only telephone service that is functionally equivalent to voice telephone service for individuals who cannot converse in written English, including individuals who are foreign born or speak Spanish. Because ASL is native to America, most Spanish speaking individuals who are deaf use ASL, even if they are not fully acquainted with the English language.

Since the reduction in VRS rate last July, access to VRS has suffered considerably. Specifically, hours have been cut and answer times by many VRS providers have risen dramatically, causing users to wait as much as ten to twenty minutes to make a single telephone call. Deaf consumers have become increasingly discontent with not being able to access VRS with the same ease that hearing individuals can access the conventional voice telephone network. In addition, since the rate cut, VRS providers have had an increasingly difficult time financially, and have been unable to invest resources into much needed research and development that can improve VRS.

Notwithstanding the present wait times for VRS, use of VRS has steadily increased over the past year because as word about VRS has spread, people who use ASL have come to realize that VRS is the only truly functionally equivalent means for them to conduct telephone calls. This is because of the many benefits that VRS offers: natural, real-time conversations that do not have the same delays between messages that users experience with traditional text-to-voice relay services, the ability to convey emotions, the ability to conduct conference calls, the ability to interact with voice prompt telephone systems, etc.

In order to achieve true functional equivalency, the existing VRS waiver for answer speeds needs to be eliminated. Only if VRS users are able to make VRS calls with the same ease as voice callers have when making conventional voice calls will VRS be able to provide the type of service that is needed to effectively conduct one's daily affairs. VRS has become an increasingly important tool in the workplace, enabling ASL users to finally be able to use the telephone effectively in the course of their jobs. In particular, deaf governmental workers are increasingly finding that the benefits of VRS can assist them in carrying out their job functions.

Sincerely,

Karen Peltz Strauss

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Legal Consultant for CSD